Reporting on Key Competencies in Mathematics, Reading Comprehension, Expository Writing, and Student Engagement with School in the Middle Years

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REPORTING ON KEY COMPETENCIES IN MATHEMATICS, READING COMPREHENSION, EXPOSITORY WRITING, AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH SCHOOL IN THE MIDDLE YEARS

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INTRODUCTION

In May 2004, the Department announced its plan to consult with educators, parents, and the public on a classroom-based, teacher-led assessment and reporting system focussing on critical competencies in reading comprehension, mathematics, expository writing, and student engagement with school in the Middle Years.

This policy is based on the recommendations arising from consultations that took place in Fall 2004. The consultation report, *Student Assessment as Public Learning: Report on Consultations and Recommendations for a Provincial Student Assessment Policy—Grade 6 to Senior 1*, is available on the Internet at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/assess/publications.html>.

The consultation report points to the multiple purposes for student assessment and to the importance of information being available to a number of audiences, including the general public, on how students are performing in school. It also stresses the importance of engaging students in the assessment process itself in ways that go beyond some traditional notions of student assessment.

Assessment (judgments of student performance) is vital to the education process. In schools, summative assessment is most visible since it is used to measure what students have learned at the end of a unit, to promote students, to certify school completion, etc. But assessment also serves a formative function. In classrooms where formative assessment refers to frequent, interactive assessments of student progress and understanding to identify learning needs and adjust teaching appropriately, the gains in student achievement are quite considerable (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005; Black and Wiliam, 2005; Allal and Lopez, 2005; Wiggins, 1998).

The OECD study (OECD 2005) also reports that parents who were given the opportunity to become familiar with alternate forms of reporting of their children's progress, such as through more extensive use of narratives and rubrics, found this helpful and informative, and gave them more guidance in how they might help their children with school work.

This new Middle Years policy both reflects and supports the crucial role that formative, classroom-based assessment, integrated with instruction, has on student learning. The policy also expands upon the competencies addressed in the Grade 3 assessment policy to include expository writing[1] and student engagement with school. It will also include opportunities for students to become even more engaged in assessing their own progress. An overview of assessment initiatives at the provincial level is available at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/assess/index.html>.

[1] Expository writing may inform, explain, persuade, describe, or present information for a particular purpose and audience.

PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY

The purpose of this policy is to support formative assessment practices that inform instruction, and to facilitate communication among parents, students, teachers, administrators, trustees, and the public in general regarding the achievement of students in several key competencies and in student engagement with school. Number sense, the application of number skills, and student engagement with school will be addressed at the middle of Grade 7, and reading comprehension and expository writing will be addressed at the middle of Grade 8.

IMPLEMENTATION

This policy applies to all students in Grade 7 and Grade 8 in provincially funded schools. It is recognized that a range of student performance is natural for a variety of reasons. There will be provisions in the reporting process for students who have special learning needs (e.g., cognitive disability) and who require an individualized educational plan. Students who have exceptional needs that do not change the expected curricular outcomes (for example, a student who has a physical or behavioural difficulty) should participate in the same assessment and reporting process as their peers. The key competencies to be assessed are presented in the tables below, by grade and according to school program.

English Program

Key Competency	Mid-Grade 7	Mid-Grade 8
Number Sense	✓	
Application of Number Skills	✓	
Student Engagement	✓	
Reading Comprehension		✓
Writing of Expository Texts		✓

Français Program

Key Competency	Mid-Grade 7	Mid-Grade 8
"Sens des nombres"	✓	
"Compétences Mathématiques"	✓	
"Engagement de l'élève"	✓	
"Comprehension en Lecture"		✓
"Écriture de textes informatifs"		✓
Reading Comprehension (in English)		Optional
Writing of Expository Texts (in English)		Optional

French Immersion Program

Key Competency	Mid-Grade 7	Mid-Grade 8
"Sens des nombres"	✓	
"Compétences Mathématiques"	✓	
"Engagement de l'élève"	✓	
"Comprehension en Lecture"		✓
"Écriture de textes informatifs"		✓
Reading Comprehension (in English)		✓
Writing of Expository Texts (in English)		✓

During the 2005-2006 school year, there will be a pilot-scale implementation of the policy in a small number of school divisions with which the Department will work closely, and in all Français and French Immersion program schools (details in the covering letter for this document). Based on this pilot, any necessary alterations to the logistics of implementation will be made, support materials will be revised, and examples of student work illustrating performance at various levels of achievement will be gathered for inclusion in subsequent support materials.

Support materials will be available to all Grade 7 and Grade 8 schools early in the 2005-2006 school year. Regional training workshops will be offered in Fall 2005 for piloting schools and all non-piloting schools wishing to begin implementing the policy at that time.

Provincial implementation in Grade 7 and Grade 8 classrooms in school divisions and for funded independent schools is scheduled for the 2006-2007 school year. Non-funded and band-operated schools are invited to participate, and will have access to materials and training for this purpose.

The Department will provide a brochure for parents with information about this policy.

ASSESSING STUDENTS

In the last two weeks of January, teachers will make and record judgments on each student's level of attainment on the particular competencies. This judgment will not be based on a single measure such as an exam, but on evidence of student achievement gathered over the first several months of the school year as part of the normal teaching and learning process. Teachers will exercise professional judgment when identifying the processes for gathering assessment information. Teachers' evaluations of students' levels of performance will be made relative to mid-year criteria provided by the Department, with the criteria being derived from curricular, grade-level learning outcomes.

The evaluation of student performance for this policy is not restricted to language arts and mathematics teachers, and may include input from teacher teams, especially for student engagement with school. Students will also have the opportunity to gauge their own performance, including for student engagement, relative to the same criteria used by teachers. This is intended to engage students in their own learning and lead to discussions among students, parents, and teachers regarding learning and progress.

TRAINING AND SUPPORT

So that reported performance results are as reliable[2] and as valid[3] as possible, the Department will support the implementation of this policy by

- offering professional learning opportunities to teachers and administrators, so they can
  - ◊ both confirm and extend their learning in student assessment to ensure that the assessment activities fit the intended purposes
  - ◊ develop a common understanding of the provincial curriculum-based criteria for assessing student performance on each of the key competencies
  - ◊ understand the importance of attending to reliability and validity in assessment
- providing support materials for monitoring student progress, including assessment criteria supported by student examples

A combination of centralized and regional (YAG) training sessions will be used both during initial implementation and for ongoing training and support. Alternate strategies (e.g., CD, video) will be developed to provide additional accessible support.

Orientation sessions will be offered to parents, students, and administrators.

[2] Reliability refers to the degree to which reported results are dependable in the sense that they would be the same if carried out by a different teacher, and/or using different strategies.

[3] Validity refers to the appropriateness of interpretations made of reported results such as students' performance levels. In the context of this policy, it will be crucial that assessment strategies (e.g., tools and strategies, performance descriptors, criteria) accurately reflect the identified key competencies (derived from curriculum documents) and evaluation guidelines.

REPORTING RESULTS

Schools will report each student's performance by the spring break in two ways—to students and parents, and to the Department. Schools and school-divisions will include an analysis of school/school division-level results in reports to the community, along with appropriate contextual background information.

The performance levels used for reporting will reflect students' knowledge and skills in the mathematics and language arts competencies demonstrated in the classroom, and be linked directly to the mid-year criteria provided by the Department. Performance categories such as those listed below will be employed

- at or above grade level
- approaching grade level
- below grade level

These performance categories will be reviewed as part of the pilot process, as will strategies for reporting on student engagement with school.

The Department will publicly report results at the provincial and program levels by June of the school year (but not in the 2005-2006 pilot year), as well as address specific areas of interest and research. There will be no departmental public reporting that will permit the identification of a student, class, school, or school division. Data may be made available to external research groups for educational research purposes as and where may be appropriate.

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